

Investigating the Mediating Role of Authentic Personality in the Relationship Between Perception of School Climate and Academic Hope

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the relationship between students' perceptions of school climate and their academic hope, focusing on the mediating role of their authentic personalities. The researchers employed a descriptive correlational method using structural equation modeling to achieve this objective. The study focused on first-grade high school students in Mahabad city, with a sample of 368 students selected through convenience sampling. The research utilized several standardized instruments, including the School Climate Questionnaire by Pashiardis (2000), the Shegefti and Samani Academic Hope Questionnaire (2011), and the Authentic Personality Questionnaire by Wood et al. (2008). The findings revealed a direct and significant relationship between perceptions of school climate and academic hope. Additionally, the analysis indicated that authentic personality significantly mediates the relationship between school climate and academic hope. The model fit indices suggested that the research model was appropriate. In conclusion, this study suggests that to enhance students' academic hope, it is important to consider both the supportive school environment and the cultivation of students' authentic personalities.

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Introduction

School is the foundation for development and constructive transformation in society. It gradually leads society towards prosperity, growth, and sustainable development by educating and developing students' talents, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The school has a complex social system and interactive human relationships that transform inputs from the environment ([Kiamanesh et al., 2014](#); [Nabaei et al., 2021](#); [Oleksiyenko et al., 2024](#); and [Akhmedov et al., 2023](#)).

One of the most important variables related to the educational system is academic hope. hope is an active trait that includes purpose, planning power, and the will to achieve goals. This cognitive-motivational concept has a rich history in psychological theories of motivation and is rooted in biological, psychological, and social sources ([Dixon, 2022](#)). Academic hope arises from the interaction of the agent and the pathway. The "agent" is the decision to initiate and strengthen effort, and the "pathway" is the planning of various ways to achieve progress goals ([Barani et al., 2020](#)).

The agent and the pathway are two important and interconnected components that interact with each other and create hope through common steps. However, obstacles and stressors are challenges that a person must overcome. Therefore, hopeful people believe, based on their mental experiences, that they can be successful despite challenges. Conversely, hopeless people, based on their mental experiences, feel defeated and helpless when faced with problems and make less effort to resolve them. A sense of optimism and foresight accompanies hope and is a cognitive, emotional, and motivational state that leads a person toward a bright future. Therefore, hope in the educational field also makes students more hopeful about the future despite challenges and more confident in the effectiveness of their actions. This perspective motivates the person to engage in educational and learning activities ([Michaeli Manba et al., 2017](#)).

Academic hope is influenced by various conditions, including individual characteristics, family, relationships with peers, and the school environment, and changes and evolves according to these conditions ([Chen et al., 2020](#)). A suitable and desirable school environment will undoubtedly provide the basis for students' flourishing and growth.

School climate represents students' perception of the environment in which they are located and results from how individuals interact with each other in school ([Tarahi & Jafarzadeh, 2021](#)). The perception of school climate is a multidimensional and complex construct that is defined as norms, values, and expectations and is referred to as the quality and characteristics perceived by students of school life. It includes the physical characteristics of the school, the psychological climate of the school, and interactions between groups of school members. Research has shown that the social climate of the school, as the most pervasive and important aspect of the school environment, is a factor in the formation of positive and negative communications, interactions, and behaviors in students ([Mikaeli Manba et al., 2017](#); [Heidaryani et al., 2022](#); and [McGiboney, 2023](#)).

Examining school climate and its perception is of particular importance in educational systems because these systems interact with a large number of students and contribute to their learning experiences and personality formation ([Dixon & Gentzis, 2023](#) and [kord, 2018](#)).

An authentic personality is one of the most important aspects of a healthy life. A review of the history of personality authenticity reveals that self-knowledge and acting in accordance with that self-knowledge are fundamental to authenticity, which has always been regarded as a moral value. Horney's theory (1951) suggests that an authentic personality is developed through comparison with others and that healthy personality development is achievable when individuals accept their thoughts and feelings as they are. This perspective links authenticity with a healthy life and personality, indicating that cultivating authenticity can lead to better well-being ([Putri et al., 2023](#)).

Authenticity is a prelude to a healthy life and the main essence of well-being. When a person has sufficient knowledge of himself and his talents, he will usually be more capable of choosing goals and life paths and less likely to suffer from various psychological and social harms. Therefore, authentic personality, as an influential and important variable, can affect the behavior of students in the school environment and beyond it at the community level ([Chopra & Chhabra, 2022](#)).

Considering the importance of mental health, which is not hidden from anyone, and on the other hand, that many individual and social problems are rooted in mental problems, it is possible to examine the conditions governing the perception of the school atmosphere and the authentic personality of students, to examine the state of academic hope and its improvement, and to suggest effective solutions for its enhancement. Therefore, considering the importance and influence of students who constitute the future generation of any society, it is necessary to examine the above variables in order to have active and mentally healthy individuals. Therefore, the question of the present study is whether authentic personality has a significant mediating role in the relationship between the perception of the school atmosphere and the academic hope of students.

Method

Sample and Sampling Method

The present study is applied research in terms of its purpose and a correlational study in terms of its method. The analysis method of this study is the structural equation model, which was used to examine the causal relationships between the research variables. The exogenous variable in this study was the perception of school climate, the mediating variable was authentic personality (endogenous), and the endogenous variable (main dependent) was academic hope. The research population consisted of first-year high school students of Mahabad in 2022-23, from which 384 people were selected as a sample using convenience sampling. The criteria for entering the study were informed consent to participate, not taking psychiatric medications, and not being addicted to drugs or alcohol. The criterion for exclusion from the study was not answering at least 5% of the questionnaire questions. It is worth noting that the ethical considerations included the voluntary nature of participation in the study and keeping the participants' information confidential.

Tools Used

School Climate Perception Questionnaire

The standard questionnaire for measuring school climate was developed by [Paschiardis \(2000\)](#). This standard questionnaire has 24 items and 3 dimensions, communication (9 items), participation (7 items), and organization and management (8 items), which are measured based on a 5-point Likert scale. The minimum score obtained for this scale is 24 and the maximum is 120. [Imamgholivand et al. \(2019\)](#) showed that the scale had satisfactory validity and reliability through Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales of communication (0.88), participation (0.79), and organization and management (0.83) and the total scale (0.88). In the present study, reliability was reported by Cronbach's alpha method (0.88).

academic Hope Questionnaire

is developed based on Snyder's research on hope. This questionnaire consists of 9 questions and assesses two factors: gateway thoughts and agent thoughts. It measures educational hope using a Likert scale. Its internal and external validity is desirable, and its reliability is approved ([Shaghofti Sohrabi & Samani, 2011](#)). In this study, the reliability of the questionnaire was reported using Cronbach's alpha method, with a value of (0.82).

Authentic Personality Questionnaire

Developed by Wood et al. (2008), it includes the Authentic Personality Scale. This 12-item scale is designed to be self-reported, with responses ranging from "does not describe me at all" (0) to "completely describes me" (7). The scale measures three factors: "self-alienation" (4 items), "acceptance of external influences" (4 items), and "authentic living" (4 items). It is important to note that the items related to "authentic living" are reverse-scored. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale for the subscales of self-alienation, authentic living, and acceptance of external influences and the total score were 0.80, 0.77, 0.81, and 0.82, respectively. The split-half reliability coefficient of the scale was also estimated to be 0.74 ([Shamsi et al., 2012](#)). This study assessed the scale's reliability using Cronbach's alpha, which was reported as 0.77.

Procedure

Procedure Authorized by the Department of Education and school administrators, the questionnaires were completed voluntarily by students. Before distribution, students were given clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaires and anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were reassured. This study is derived from a master's thesis in Educational Psychology. To statistically analyze the data in this study, descriptive statistics of the research variables, including central tendencies and measures of dispersion were calculated using SPSS software (version 26). Subsequently, path analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were conducted with AMOS software (version 21) to assess the fit indices of the research model and examine the relationships among the variables within the research model.

Results

Out of the 384 participants in the present study, the lowest frequency was related to the age of 13, and the highest frequency was for ages 14 to 15. First, outliers were identified by examining the statistical assumptions using skewness and kurtosis tests. Then, using the Mahalanobis distance test, outliers were removed, and finally, the number of samples was reduced to 368.

Table 1 shows the descriptive indices, skewness, kurtosis, and Pearson correlation coefficients of the variables in the present study.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of research variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Perception of school climate	1		
2. Academic hope	**0.41	1	
3. Original personality	**0.47	**0.55	1
Mean	72.12	21.20	40.81
Standard deviation	0.85	1.56	0.23
Skewness	0.42	0.26	-0.34
Kurtosis	-0.13	-0.47	0.17

* $P < 0.05$, $P < 0.001$ **

Table 1 shows a significant relationship between the perception of school atmosphere and academic hope at the 0.01 level, and between school atmosphere and authentic personality at the 0.01 level. The highest correlation was between the perception of school atmosphere and authentic personality ($p < 0.01$, $r = 0.55$), and the lowest correlation was between the perception of school atmosphere and academic hope ($p < 0.01$, $r = 0.41$). Similarly, by calculating (R^2), the variance between the perception of school atmosphere and academic hope is 0.168, meaning that 16.8 percent of academic hope is explained through the perception of school atmosphere. By calculating (R^2) between authentic personality and academic hope, the result is 0.302, meaning that 30.2 percent of academic hope is explained through authentic personality. Given that the skewness and kurtosis indices obtained for the research variables in the table above are all in the range of +2 to -2, the distribution shape of the variables is under almost normal conditions. In addition to the reported values, the VIF statistic values for the variables were less than 10. Therefore, there is no multicollinearity between the predictor variables. To test the desired model—namely the mediating role of authentic personality—the structural equation modeling method was used. The parameters for measuring direct relationships are presented in Figure 1 and Table 2. In Figure 1, the research's structural model is presented by examining the mediating role of authentic personality in the relationship between perception of school climate and academic hope, along with its path coefficients. In this model, the authentic personality variable, as a mediating variable, has played a significant and enhancing role in the relationship between the perception of school climate and academic hope.

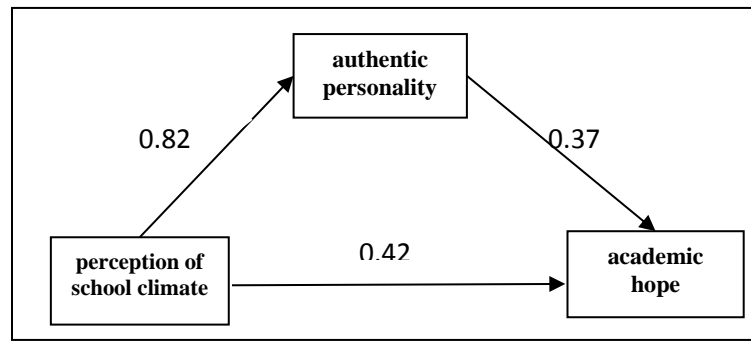


Figure 1: Research model

As can be seen in Figure 1, there is a significant relationship at the 0.001 level between the perception of school climate and academic hope (B=0.46), perception of school climate with authentic personality (B=0.82), and finally, authentic personality and academic hope (B=0.37).

Table 2. Estimates of the direct effect coefficients of variables

Variables	<u>B</u>	β	S.E.	<u>T</u> (C.R)	<u>P</u>
School atmosphere -- Academic hope	0.41	0.46	0.02	7.67	0.001
School atmosphere -- Authentic personality	0.86	0.73	0.02	9/40	0.001
School atmosphere—Authentic personality--Academic hope	0.45	0.37	0.02	5.66	0.001

The results obtained from Table 2 showed that the standardized coefficients between the variables are significant. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), when all relationships are significant, the mediating role of the mediator variable is confirmed. In other words, the original personality variable significantly mediates between the perception of school climate and academic hope.

Table 3. Direct and Indirect Effects (Standardized)

Variable1	Variable2	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Lower limit	Upper limit
School atmosphere	Authentic personality	0.46	0.30	0.76	0.02	0.13

Table 3 shows a significant indirect effect of authentic personality on the relationship between school climate perception and life expectancy, measured at 0.30.

Table 4. Model fit indices

Index	X ²	df	X ² /df	P.Value	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI
Estimated values	11845.45	6	1955.75	0.001	0.18	0.92	0.98	0.98
Criterion values	-	-	* ≥ 3	-	* $\geq 0/01$	* ≤ 0.9	* ≤ 0.9	* ≤ 0.9

According to Table 4, the fit indices of the research model indicate that all parameters are at an acceptable level. Therefore, the operational model of the research exhibits a meaningful structure and a desirable fit.

Discussion

The present study investigates the relationship between the perception of school climate and academic hope with the mediating role of students' authentic personalities. The findings showed a significant relationship between the perception of school climate and academic hope, and between the perception of school climate and authentic personality. These results are consistent with the findings of [McGiboney \(2023\)](#), [Dixson and Gentzis \(2023\)](#), [Putri et al. \(2023\)](#), [Nabaei et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Chopra and Chhabra \(2022\)](#). These findings show that creating and maintaining a positive, supportive, and constructive school educational environment is very effective. Factors such as teacher support and motivation, cooperation and solidarity among students, and the absence of violence and tensions in the educational environment can directly and indirectly affect students' academic hope. Therefore, to increase and promote students' academic hope, it is necessary to design the educational environment of schools to provide a positive and motivating school atmosphere and to carry out programs and activities that help strengthen students' authentic personalities. These measures can lead to improved academic performance and personal growth of students. A supportive educational environment increases the favorable perception of the school atmosphere so that students feel safe and motivated to learn. For this purpose, methods such as creating friendly educational spaces, providing positive and constructive feedback to students, and promoting cooperation and solidarity among them can be used.

To investigate the mediating role of authentic personality in the relationship between perception of school climate and academic hope, the findings showed that authentic personality as a mediating variable plays a significant and enhancing role between the variables of perception of school climate and academic hope. This finding is consistent with the results of research by [Chen et al. \(2020\)](#), [Barani et al. \(2020\)](#), [Dixson and Gentzis \(2023\)](#), [Kord \(2018\)](#), [Tarahi and Jafarzadeh \(2021\)](#), and [Jenaabadi and Bahri \(2023\)](#). In explaining this finding, it should be acknowledged that authentic personality is manifested through self-awareness, self-acceptance, and the ability to express one's true self in social situations. Individuals with authentic personalities have a positive view of their environment, including school, and consider school as an opportunity for personal and academic progress and growth. This positive perception of school climate can act as a motivating factor to increase hope for academic progress. Therefore, the perception of school climate and authentic personality are two important factors that directly and significantly affect students' academic hope. In other words, the existence of a positive and constructive educational environment combined with an individual who has an authentic, independent, honest, and self-confident personality and adherence to values and principles can pave the way for forming, consolidating, and strengthening students' academic hope. Therefore, a positive, effective, and constructive school climate can help strengthen students' authentic personalities and increase academic hope. Consequently, psychology experts in this field must emphasize the importance of a positive perception of school climate to promote students' academic hope by emphasizing aspects of authentic personality.

The present study's major limitation was the lack of random sampling, which limited the generalizability of the results. Also, given that the sample studied included students, it is suggested that similar studies be conducted on samples of the general population and students with special needs.

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